



Testifying in court can be a frightening experience for anyone, especially children. Reducing a child's anxiety about testifying was the driving force behind developing the Kids in Court program. The Maricopa County

Attorney's Office Kids in Court Program brings attorneys, judges and social workers together to help child victims and witnesses prepare to testify in court. In a courtroom setting, Victim Witness Advocates, attorneys, and a Superior Court Judge role play with the child victims. The group setting helps children feel less isolated when they realize other children are going through the same experience.

The program emphasizes "telling the truth" in a supportive, educational and fun atmosphere. Children age six to 13 who will be testifying at trial as victims or witnesses are eligible to attend along with their siblings and parents.

This innovative program has therapeutic benefits for children even if the case does not go to trial. Children have a chance to gain practical knowledge about being a witness as well as a sense of empowerment over the experience.

The Kids in Court program has successfully raised the comfort level for hundreds of children and their families participating in the criminal justice process. For more information, please contact your Victim Witness Advocate or call the Victim Witness Division at (602) 506-8522.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Romley
Maricopa County Attorney



Maricopa County Attorney's Office
301 West Jefferson, Suite 900
Phoenix, AZ 85003
www.maricopa.gov/attorney

KIDS IN COURT



Program Overview Structure of the Program Staff



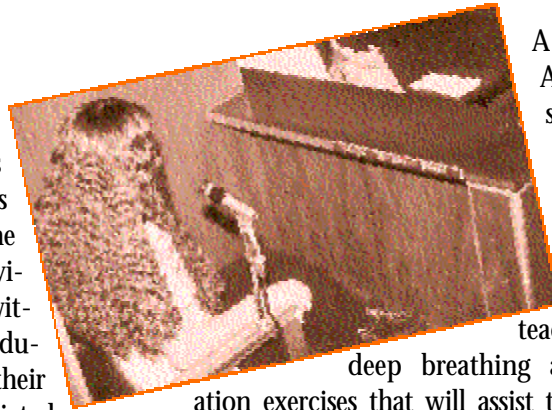
MARICOPA COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
RICHARD M. ROMLEY
County Attorney

Kids in Court Program Overview

The Victim Witness Division of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office offers a program to help children and their families prepare for court. The first Kids in Court was held in October of 1994. After realizing the benefits of the Kids in Court program, the division expanded it to include all child victim witnesses. The program offers a supportive and educational experience to help children and their parents/guardians reduce the anxiety associated with the court process.

The program begins in a classroom setting with children and parents sitting together. This is done so the children feel less threatened. Also, this allows them to realize that others are going through the same experience. Following a brief introduction, the video, "It's Called a Witness Chair," is shown to the participants. This video, developed by the Arizona Supreme Court, explains the roles of different people in court. It also gives the children tips for testifying such as how to ask for a break and what to say if you do not know an answer.

After the video, the program is turned over to a Deputy County Attorney who goes over additional tips for testifying and reinforces the concepts taught in the video. Emphasis is placed on the importance of telling the truth in court. The Deputy County Attorney does not go over the facts of any case, but rather asks children whimsical questions, such as, "What is your favorite color?"



A Victim Witness Advocate then speaks to the children about relaxation techniques that can be used while in court. The advocate teaches the children deep breathing and muscle-relaxation exercises that will assist them while testifying. They are also taught how to give themselves support through positive self-talk.

Children and parents are then taken to a real courtroom to view the layout and to meet with a Judge. After the Judge gives a brief presentation, the parents are separated from the children. While the children participate in role playing activities, the parents have their own session with a Victim Witness Advocate and Deputy County Attorney. Additional information about the court process and available services will be presented in this parents only session. Advocates will address individual concerns and questions that do not involve the specific facts of any case. Parents will rejoin children for the remainder of the program. At the end of the program, a small graduation ceremony is held.

The Kids in Court program allows the children to experience the court room in an interesting and non-threatening situation prior to trial. It also gives parents the tools they need to assist their child in dealing with the trial process.

Structure of the Program

The Kids In Court program is held once a month for approximately two hours. The program is designed for child victim/witnesses between the ages of six and 13. Participation is limited to 15 child witnesses and their families per session. The group setting provides an opportunity for children to feel less isolated by knowing that there are other children who are also going through the same experiences.



Children are referred to the program by the prosecutor or victim witness advocate once a firm trial date has been set. Families will then be contacted and invited to attend the program. Kids In Court

is intended as a supplement to individualized trial preparation with the child.

Staff

The Kids In Court program is staffed by professional Victim Witness Advocates, Deputy County Attorneys and Judges who volunteer their time. Judges who are scheduled to hear a case in which a Kids In Court participant will be a witness, will not volunteer to speak to the program during that month. The program is coordinated by the Victim Witness Division and follows a script which was developed by a committee of professionals with a recognized interest in this area.

Your Appointment: _____